

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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McGarvey 202/343-5634

EIGHT CROCODILE SPECIES PROPOSED FOR ENDANGERED LIST

Eight crocodile species found in over 40 countries around the world have been proposed for treatment as endangered species because they look like other crocodile species that are, in fact, listed as endangered.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 allows a "similarity of appearance" treatment if law enforcement problems result from look-alike animals.

Public comments are invited on this proposal through July 6, 1977.

The proposal was published in the April 6, 1977, Federal Register.

The eight species being proposed occur in Central and South America, China, and South and Southeast Asia. The force of American law does not, of course, extend to these foreign countries. American citizens, however, are forbidden under the law to trade or traffic in these animals, their parts or their products. None may be imported or exported to or from the United States.

The species are: the common caiman, brown caiman, dwarf caiman, smooth-fronted caiman, American crocodile (other than the Florida population which is already listed as endangered), Johnston's crocodile, New Guinea crocodile, and the salt water crocodile.

This initiative is being taken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service largely because of law enforcement problems caused by the inability to identify crocodile products at American ports of entry. The proposed eight species so closely resemble the eight species that are already listed that inspectors have substantial difficulty differentiating between the endangered species and the "look-alike" species, especially in the case of products made from their hides.

The differentiating characteristics of crocodilians are minute and often depend on the size and shape of the scales, their color, or the presence of follicle glands which are not readily apparent in processed hides. The color of most hides imported into the United States has been changed by preservation processes and tanning. Further, many products such as wallets, belts, and handbags have been dyed red, green, or brown, making it virtually impossible to positively identify the exact species.